

Early Curfews And Hidden Kisses by AleckIsVeryGay

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Summary:

Richie Tozier didn't have a home. Not really, anyway... Ever since he was ten, when he was shipped off in a pretty box, topped off with a golden ribbon, home was a phenomenon. It was at this age that he had entered the world of boarding school. It seemed that having a dentist for a father doomed him to rejection, sealed his fate as something to inevitably be sent away for improvement- like a tool rather than a son.

-Or-

Richie is the new student at McMannon Academy. His roommate, Eddie Kaspbrak, really isn't a fan of him, though.

1. Prologue

Author's Note:

Boarding school AU boys!! This fic is gonna be very slowburn with god-awful, painful pining. Yes, Richie does have a crush pretty much immediately and yes, Eddie is an oblivious little shit.

Richie Tozier didn't have a home. Not really, anyway. He never had a place to call his, a space of comfort, an area where things seemed right and safe. Derry used to be that for him: home. Of course, it wasn't the best town to grow up in, tales of murder seemed only natural there, but it was a place where things were familiar, predictable, strangely comfortable.

It had been a long time since he was in Derry.

Ever since he was ten, when he was shipped off in a pretty box, topped off with a golden ribbon, home was a phenomenon. It was at this age that he had entered the world of boarding school. It seemed that having a dentist for a father doomed him to rejection, sealed his fate as something to inevitably be sent away for improvement- like a tool rather than a son. Richie didn't mind boarding school so much, during his first year, at least. He made friends that he thought he'd get to know better as the year continued, he woke up at 6am sharp with a chipper smile on his face and he studied; actually tried and worked hard, just as his father wanted. As the year progressed, he began to forget the sound of his mother's voice and question what she smelt like, but it was the promise of Christmas Break, the idea of home that kept him going. It wasn't the celebration or holiday he was excited for. No, it was home. Sleeping in his bed again, seeing his parents, and eating familiar meals that didn't taste like something out of a packet every time.

He spent Christmas that year locked up in a hall, participating in half-hearted activities, which teachers had been forced to organize, with a couple of other kids he barely knew who would see their parents the week after, but were only still at school because they had work related commitments. His peers spoke to their parents on the

phone, while Richie waited patiently by his all day, only to receive silence. They opened the gifts which had been sent to them with giggles and grins, while Richie ate the sliced ham that the lunch lady had pitifully saved him. And, at night, when his friends were tucked in bed smiling, he cried and thought of home. Christmas was never exactly wonderful in the Tozier household, but its shittiness was routine and recognizable. His father would be at a conference and his mom would stumble outside already half drunk at 6.00 and join a group of strange men to the bar, but Richie would be ready for this. He would have a familiar TV to turn on, Christmas specials he was excited for and a meal sitting in the microwave. One year, his neighbors invited him around, and that was the best Christmas he'd had since the year he was five, when his dad had been able to stay home.

Christmas was what broke him. Home began to turn in to a hazy blur of mixed feelings and he was forgetting what his room looked like. So, he tried to get expelled. If he got kicked out, he figured he'd be able to return to Derry. Sure, his dad would yell at him, but even a scolding would be blissful. He pushed the limits. Sent spitballs across the classroom, skipped classes and made it obvious, told inappropriate jokes and swore whenever a teacher could hear. What really got him expelled was calling the principal a 'wrinkly old woman who is lucky to have a husband with her pig nose'. Surprisingly effective. His dad had called him and yelled, but that was just about the best he got (although the screaming reminded him of his voice, and that was almost worth it in itself). After that, he was off to Pertrude School For Boys. It was a strict place, where teachers would shamelessly give you a smack across the thigh with a ruler if you swore. Richie's legs stung often. Pertrude, while one of the worse schools Richie had gone to, taught him a lot. Like, for example, calling your second principal a wrinkly pig might not work as well as the first time. You might not go home, but you could make them cry.

Richie got expelled in less harmful ways after that. Pertrude eventually kicked him out for throwing a tub of dissected frogs in the pond at the middle of the night while screaming 'be free, my babies!' Not the worst thing he'd done that year, but the last straw.

Many schools followed, and Richie became quickly aware that Went

Tozier didn't seem interested in sending him back to Derry. By the time he was fifteen, he had acknowledged the fact that it wasn't even home anymore. There was nothing left for him there, but nothing left for him at school either.

He made friends briefly and had fun, but never got attached. Getting expelled became an exciting game for him, where he'd see how long he lasted. He always made sure to respect staff member's feelings, though, and never called anyone a pig again. Sometimes, he made friends that he didn't really want to leave behind, but eventually he fucked up big enough to warrant expulsion. And he just accepted it. Accepted that he didn't belong anywhere and nowhere would be home.

In his mind, Richie Tozier was a genius who had figured out what no one else could. Everyone else, all the plebs, were spending their time worrying about exams while Richie was having fun and saying fuck it to everything. Richie didn't exactly see the point in living a life of comfort and consistency when he had nothing to care about, anyway; no one back home seemed bothered if he messed up. Richie enjoyed himself and inevitably got expelled. He didn't have a home but that was just fine, because no one ever gave a shit, himself included.

Notes for the Chapter:

Updates are gonna be pretty slow on this fic, I'm afraid, because my attention is far more focused on *Those Innocent Days Fly By Like A Summer Haze*.
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:))

2. One- Richie

Summary for the Chapter:

Settling in to a new boarding school, with a roommate who is downright adorable, is a tough challenge for Richie Tozier.

McMannon Academy was, at least from an outsider perspective, like any other boarding school. Founded by Mannis McMannon, a frankly ridiculous name which Richie would *not* be able to resist teasing, the school was Catholic with a paired Jewish/ Muslim program for alternative religions. Which, as far as boarding schools go, was pretty progressive. It was Richie's second unisex boarding school. Ever since the first one, Went had enrolled him to *boys only* schools (Richie's first unisex school experience ended, rather dramatically, when he was caught hanging out in the girl's change rooms. The hilarity of the situation was that he had been caught chatting in there, whilst his scandalous trysts in the boy's change rooms remained unpunished. *Yuck it up, Went Tozier, but sending your son to all boy's schools will only add fuel to the fire.*) According to the brochure his father mailed him, McMannon valued success, respect and, above all, kindness. Not like Richie really cared, every school said they 'valued' the same things, but just used different fancy variations of the same word.

The uniform rules reflected a similar trend- pretty much the same to every other boarding school, with enough variety to feign a sense of community and individuality. Years of various boarding schools had earned Richie a god-like ability to find loopholes within rules and pull off a semi-decent appearance. He had, for example, taken the mandatory, token blue and white striped tie and lazily thrown it around his neck loosely, half-tied to give a rock star appearance. He wore his stifling, tight button up (a plain white, which Richie was sure would get stained in the first week) with a grand total of *two* buttons undone from the top, like the wild kid he is. Finally, he wore black converse, one of his greater feats/ tricks which he had used in pretty much *every school* he attended. Whenever told to change his shoes, Richie would shoot the teacher a deadly grin and mutter as politely as he could '*actually, any shoe can be a school shoe if you try*

hard enough and use a little imagination, Miss.'

The school itself was located on a private estate which was surrounded by miles and miles of grass, as far away from humanity (and Derry) as possible. To get to McMannon, Richie's taxi had twisted and winded for miles across a narrow one-way drive made of gravel. The first thing he noticed once the school grounds came to view was how *huge* it really was, closer to a college campus than a high school. There was a great, box-like main building: at least 3 or 4 stories high. Scattered around were other smaller buildings, presumably where the dorms were located. Even from the entrance, Richie knew there was more that was simply obscured by the architecture. Of course, he had been to big schools before, but this one took the cake- by far the largest, richest school he'd attended. It's exterior screamed *boarding school*, fancy for what seemed like the sole purpose of burning the retinas of any peasants who happened upon it.

Stepping on to the gravelly asphalt of the entrance, he offered the taxi driver one of his better voices: an Englishman straight out of *Oliver Twist*.

"Cheers, guv'nor." He saluted before obnoxiously slamming the door and watching as the car pulled out of sight. He made sure to wave and wave until the vehicle had become a small spec, a shit-eating grin painted across his face all the while. Turning around, he noticed a man with a long, bored face walking towards him. He was balding, a shiny ring of skin poking out of his thinning hair, and wore a pair of thick-rimmed glasses. Richie had to physically bite down the urge to exclaim '*twinsies!*' and swap glasses once the man was in reach.

"Richard Tozier?" He asked, peering down at a paper which had his name on it, apparently.

"Yep. But since we're buddies, you can call me Richie." He shot a wink at the man, the teacher, and grinned wide, a hand exchanged to shake. In response, he eyed his stretched out fingers and turned away from him, walking towards the school as he spoke.

"You're late, was the taxi held up?" Richie shrugged, tucking his

hands in to his uniform pant pockets.

“Only by fifteen minutes.” He pointed out because *seriously? Fifteen minutes?* The man, who still hadn’t mentioned his name, made a sound halfway between a groan and a grunt.

“You’ll have to visit Principal Vice after the assembly, then,” He looked behind his shoulder, regarding Richie, and gave him a once over “Straighten your tie and have those shoes changed by tomorrow.” Richie coughed, grabbing at his tie and pulling it up to his neck as he spoke.

“Actually, sir. Any shoe can be a school shoe if you-“

“Quicken the pace, Richard. Assembly begins in five minutes.” The teacher’s voice was lax, bored and unimpressed, indicating anything *other than* a need to speed up. Richie walked in longer strides none the less, whistling as he moved *just to annoy him*.

One of Richie’s *least favorite parts* of changing schools had always been the mandatory assemblies where he was introduced. Sometimes, he was mercifully spared, but McMannon wasn’t so kind. Assemblies sucked because they required a healthy dose of patience and, above all, silence. Two things that Richie fundamentally lacked. To him, nothing was less appealing than having to sit still and listen to *someone else* talk. It was torture, almost as bad as having to get a haircut or change his glasses prescription. The worst part was all the *bullshit* which had been well-practiced and recited. Regardless of the school, it was common for the principal to waffle on about school values, workloads and uniform rules. It all seemed so useless to him. Like, *yeah we get it, get high grades so we look good and don’t try to kill each other in the process*.

Assemblies at McMannon appeared to be anything short of funny business: thousands of students poured in to a large gym with a thunderous *roar* and filled a sea of seats in a matter of seconds. Richie had been seated first, a mere moment before chaos, at the very

front. He sat on the far right end, in front of a row of stairs that lead to a big, black wheel-on stage (which was very clearly only ever pulled out for assemblies). Beside him was a rabbit-like woman with white hair. She smelt heavily of cheap perfume, it was unmistakably the smell of a *teacher*. Spilling out of his chair, he made sure to angle his long, gangly legs away from her, as not to knock knees the whole time. She gave Richie a polite enough grin as they waited and, in response, he shot her a slick pair of finger guns. She smiled in a way that was *supposed* to show distaste but had a faint layer of amusement underneath and ignored him for the rest of the time.

When the assembly finally commenced, and the loud mumble of chatter finally died down, a round, bald man walked on stage. He wore a green golfer vest and beige khakis, up-keeping a very *rich man* aesthetic. Richie stifled an amused laugh with the heel of his hand, because he really *did look like a principal*. He picked up a microphone and tapped on to it, as if that would somehow turn the thing on. In a routine which Richie had never failed to observe in *any given* school, he spoke in to the microphone, voice muted, and continued until it turned on and the sound of his low, old voice rang through everyone's ears.

Richie didn't spend much time paying attention to the content of the assembly, and instead took it upon himself to entertain the first years behind him. Occasionally, he turned around and offered a row of boys funny looks, crossing his eyes and sticking out his tongue. The kids were about 13, reaching the peak of '*I'm too cool for that babyish stuff*' age, and so they snickered for a moment or two before looking away as if nothing had happened, trying to keep a cool and adult exterior. Richie spent the other half of his time turning to a group of girls and rolling his eyes occasionally, mouthing the word '*boringgg*' every now and then. Some of them giggled, and one girl shot him a grin and whispered '*I know, right?*' It was, in his opinion, a good use of his time.

Eventually, he noticed the way Principal Vice's voice changed from a practiced drone to a nervous, jittery and spontaneous tone. He turned around and began to pay attention.

“And finally, before you are all dismissed, I’d like to introduce the newest member to our community,” He looked down at Richie kindly enough with a welcoming smile “If you’d like to come introduce yourself.”

Richie rose from his seat rather enthusiastically, bounding up to the stage as if his life depended on it. This was always the highlight of beginning at a new school. It was as if he was on a TV show like the bachelor or something, feeling a need to make his first impression count with a quick and witty one-liner. He could feel the gaze of the school body on his back, and it filled his veins with sweet adrenalin and energy. Crowds never failed to make him feel *alive*, like a good shot of heroin in his system (without the life-ruining effects). With a grin, he took the microphone from the principal and gazed out to the blurry haze of bodies. He wasn’t quite sure what would come out of his mouth before it opened, but he was confident it’d be something *good*. You could always rely on Richie Tozier’s mouth to shoot a decent quip at lighting speed: his lips always seemed to think before *he* did. He grinned wide.

“Hello, my name is Richie Tozier and I am McMannon’s newest bachelor.” For good measure, he shot a wink across the crowd. *Not too bad, he’d say*. Clearly, his mind was still stuck on *The Bachelor* and love contestant shows when he had spoken, but it was a good enough line, if the audience’s reaction was anything to go by. Students snickered and giggled with their friends, which was a fairly decent response as far as assemblies go. He had never really seen a roar of hearty laughter during an assembly except for that one time he had managed to rig the school’s laptop and play *Africa* by Toto across the loudspeakers. He thought that *surely* that one would get him kicked out, but instead he was given a month’s detention and solitary meals for a week: a fair punishment but not quite what he had been prepared for.

Richie handed the microphone back to Principal Vice, brimming to see what his reaction would be. If he was annoyed, Richie would for sure last no longer than three months at McMannon, and maybe he could even beat his personal best of two. If he laughed along, it would be a good amount of time until he got to him. Which in its own way could be fun, since there was nothing Richie liked more

than innocently riling up school staff members.

“Thank you, Mr. Tozier.” He merely responded, voice pleasant enough. He was a tough one to understand, that was for sure. Richie simply nodded and walked coolly back to his seat, plopping beside the white-haired teacher, who smiled at him with an amused expression. *You’ll like me until you have to teach me*, Richie thought as his ass hit the plastic chair.

The moment the assembly concluded, chaos spread through the gym like wildfire. A burst of sound bashed off the walls, hundreds of conversations clashing and creating a confused bubble of *sound*. Richie rose from his seat and slowly hovered behind the trailing crowd which was pouring out of the gym with a series of pushes and shoves. He tucked his hands in his pockets, taking slow yet long strides. It was a Monday, so most of the kids were probably feeling tired and wrung out- desperate to head in to their dorms and kick back.

Richie noticed a body hovering beside him, and turned to catch his gaze with green eyes.

“Nice shoes.” They- *she*- pointed out. Richie’s first thought upon getting a good look at the girl talking to him was that she was *beautiful*, radiant in the way a burning bonfire may be magnificent. His second thought was that there was a brimming danger flickering behind her eyes, a look that *dared* him to impress her. Her nose was speckled with freckles which seemed to be perfectly placed with purpose, but her most discernable feature was her short, fiery hair.

“Could say the same about your makeup.” He pointed out, nodding towards her face. She wasn’t exactly following school dress code, either. A sure pigment of black eyeliner was smudged beneath her lower lash line, and her skirt had hiked *way above* the knees, sitting somewhere at her mid-thigh. If that wasn’t enough, her school blouse was defiantly untucked, and she matched Richie with the sneaky ‘two

buttons undone' trick. She let out a soft chuckle, her smirk almost audible with it.

"I'm Beverly." She nodded and held out her hand for a shake. Riche took it perhaps too eagerly and noted the way her hand was both *loose* and *deathly tight* at the same time. With two eager jerks up and down, their hands disconnected.

"Richie." He offered with a wink. Beverly rolled her eyes, but grinned twice as wide.

"I noticed. '*Newest Bachelor?*'" Her voice was laced with a thick sarcasm, as if she was saying 'really?'.

"You know it, sweet cheeks." He responded, wiggling his eyebrows at Beverly. She shot him a challenging look, and it was in that moment that Richie knew they would be friends. She was *too good* for his flirting and she knew it.

"Are you cool, Tozier?" She asked, looking around and indicating that she'd be leaving soon. Richie loved the way she *asked him*, as if testing if his response would be good enough for her time.

"Cooler than a refrigerator, baby." Beverly snorted prettily (*how is that even possible!?*) and rolled her eyes.

"I'll take that as a no," She moved away and in to the thickness of the crowd, waving a hand behind "See you around."

"Don't have too many sex dreams about me!" Richie called, probably too loudly because several teachers shot him a look. Beverly looked over her shoulder, laughter laced in her grin.

"Back at ya." And with that, she was gone. Richie grinned, gripping tightly at his luggage which he had been forced to bring with him to assembly. *Beverly, huh?*

Looked like he had *already* made a friend.

Richie sighed, bouncing his knees anxiously as he sat outside the Principal's Office. The lady at the front desk typed loudly at a keyboard with nimble fingers, a hollow *tap, tap, tapping* filling the room. Occasionally, she looked up at Richie, hardly wavering when their gazes met. Richie shot her a smile and wave. In response, her attention travelled back to the computer's monitor slowly, a ghost of an eye roll. Richie clicked his tongue, dipping his elbows on to his knees and his face in to his hands tiredly. Sitting. Waiting. So far the day had been full of *patience*, and he was just about running dry of any of that.

Instead of listening to the voice in the back of his head, the one which was calling for him to run around and flap his arms back and forth like a bird, Richie looked around the room. Everything was neat, tidy, what you'd expect from a waiting room, really. He was vaguely reminded of his dad's office, the waiting room of the dentistry he worked at, a hazy image that he couldn't *quite* see sitting in the back of his mind. It had been a good six (*God, maybe even seven*) years since he'd been there. He remembered the cutting smell of *clean*, a similar scent that he could sense now, and the vacancy of décor. This room was comparable: white walls, vague paintings which were immediately inoffensive and a row of chairs on either side of the room. He could almost recall the anxiety that would bubble in his lungs whenever he waited for his dad to leave and take him home, or the way his breath hitched when he was scheduled for a checkup. Richie was sure he could feel that now, if his sweaty hands were anything to go by. Then again, maybe that had been the point. He could vaguely remember reading something about that before- rooms being designed as intentionally unpleasant. If that was true, then perhaps the room he was sitting in had used this technique. After all, visiting the principal had a similar level of unpleasantness to having a dentist's appointment. Maybe it wasn't just the waiting room either, maybe boarding schools were deliberately designed horribly, designed to suck the life out of you. Walking down school halls, particularly at McMannon, did seem to drag on, as if you were walking in a carnival funhouse where the word 'fun' was replaced with 'boring'.

Just as Richie considered a way to lace the term '*carnival boring*-'

house' in a witty joke, the door beside him opened, and Principal Vice towered over him. He looked down and gave Richie a polite smile, one which you could only *really* associate with a Principal.

"Come in, Mr. Tozier." He offered, gesturing inside invitingly.

Wiping at his pants to get rid of the nervous moisture collecting on his palms, Richie rose from his seat and walked inside. Scanning the room quickly, he noticed a stray chair opposite of Principal Vice's desk and took a seat there, waiting for the meeting to commence. He looked around haphazardly with curious eyes, noticing the bareness of his office. A few stray posters were taped carefully on the wall, one read '*Anything is possible if you bee-lieve*' with a cartoon bee, and the other read '*Achievement is only impossible if you don't try*'. Mr. Vice's desk was mostly bare, save for a large computer and cup full of pencils. The room seemed unlivd in, and Richie wondered if he was a newer staff member, or if he was merely a man who separated his life from his work. Watching as he hiked his pants up his waist before sitting, he absently imagined the inner-workings of his private life was like: did he have a wife who he kissed on the cheek and a child, or did he merely drive home after school and crack open a beer, kicking back and listening to a merciful silence which was absent of school kid cheers and screams?

"How are you, Richie?" He asked, lacing his fingers together and shuffling his wheely chair further towards his desk so his stomach hit the edge. Richie, in comparison, leant back casually.

"Alright, sir. If not a little tired and bored." Mr. Vice let out a breathy laugh, amused, and nodded.

"I'll try to make this brief, then," He began "Richard-"

"Richie." He corrected. Mr. Vice smiled and nodded.

"Richie. I'd like to address the elephant, per se, in the room." He leant to his left to bring a corded mouse to his hand, clicking and watching his computer screen intently.

"There's an elephant in here?" Richie asked, breaking the tension and

looking around himself curiously. Again, Mr. Vice let out an amused breath, before clicking his mouse once more and angling the computer to face Richie. He leant in and studied what was on the monitor: his record. Honestly surprised, because he didn't even know something like this existed, Richie let out a low and curious hum.

"Nine," Mr. Vice's meaty finger tapped at the screen, roughly towards a figure. It read: *previous schooling*. "That's nine schools in seven years. If I didn't know any better, Richie, I'd say that's almost impressive."

"Thank you, sir." Richie absently spoke, sitting back on his chair and looking back at the Principal's face. He looked gentle, kind, not at all accusatory.

"Impressive but not good," He continued, his voice almost purring "Wouldn't you agree?"

"I'd say I deserve a world record for that." Richie instead responded, grinning at the man. He smiled back with tight lips.

"May I ask what caused you to change schools so often?"

"You may." Richie replied, like the smartass he is.

"Funny." Mr. Vice noted, his voice indicating that the response was anything but. He watched Richie, seemingly waiting for a response.

"Different reasons, sir." He cryptically stated. How in the hell was he supposed to say *'my dad ignores me and, as a result, I've turned in to an attention seeking little shit'*?

"You see, Richie, I worry that this has formed a negative pattern. I'm not like most Principals," Richie tried to hold back a snicker, because that's something someone would *totally say* before doing what other people would do "I care." Richie couldn't resist, his lips curled upwards.

"Okay, sir." He responded, trying his best not to burst in to laughter. Mr. Vice frowned.

"I *do* care," He repeated, this time more firmly "and I'd like to see improvement. Of course, I'm not going to throw anything on you immediately, but keep that in mind. I care, the staff here at McMannon care, and your peers *care*. I could be your friend, Richie," He began, a pleasant enough smile on his face "But if I have to, I will intervene. Not only for the peace of this school, but for you." Richie had heard this all before. Not necessarily the '*I care*' stuff, but the '*keep yourself in check*' bullshit. It was almost too easy to expect.

"Okay." He responded. Mr. Vice cleared his throat with a hoarse '*uhm hm*' sound.

"With this being said, I noticed that you indicated," He adjusted the computer's monitor so it faced him and made a few clicks on the mouse before exclaiming with an *ah* "Drama as your subject preference."

"Yes."

"I'm very sorry, Richie, but the program emailed to you hasn't been updated yet, some preferences were muddled and such. Drama isn't a course we run here anymore." Richie scrunched his face up in clear distaste.

"Why?"

"Lack of interest." Mr. Vice shot out in a practiced manner.

"But sir, you could easily run a drama class of *five students*. It's an important subject, *surely* if you care you'd--"

"This is, I'm afraid, a matter that I am *not* lenient on." Richie's nose wrinkled, a silent '*fuck you, then*'.

"That's so--" *fucking bullshit* "Silly."

"Silly or not, you will be taking history instead."

"Don't I have a choice--"

“You’ve already been added to the roll.” Richie felt a groan roll up his throat and swallowed it down, biting at his lip to keep his mouth from running at a mile an hour. *History* was the *last* subject Richie would’ve chosen.

“Is there any way I could....” He wasn’t even sure where he was going. In a way, he answered himself by trailing off: *no. Whatever it was you wanted to ask, the answer was no.*

“McMannon can be a tough school to get around,” Principal Vice moved on, pulling a small slip from his desk’s draws and pushing it across the table with a keycard “if you show this slip to your roommate, they’ll give you a tour. Your dorm room details are on the keycard.” He folded his hands again and smiled warmly at Richie. If he wasn’t so pent up about the drama thing, he would probably smile back, because his facial expression was fundamentally *friendly*. Instead, Richie nodded and took the paper and keycard, messily pocketing them.

“Am I free to leave?” He asked.

“Free as a bird.” Mr. Vice noted. Mercifully released, Richie rose from his seat and walked carefully out of the room, grabbing his luggage bag from where it had been left in the waiting room and taking long, desperate strides outside.

As Richie had suspected, the dorms at McMannon splayed out from the main building. Each year had their own building which was split right in the middle: one side for the boy’s dorms and the other for the girls. Seniors took the west-side of the school, and the building was a small trek from the football field: not too far to sneak out, but far enough away to create the illusion of privilege and privacy. Tapping his keycard against the door, he listened to the telltale click of the lock automatically undoing and trudged inside, bounding up a set of

stairs two steps at a time. His dorm was located on the third floor, which seemed alright considering that the building was taller than it was wide. Occasionally, Richie would pass a gaggle of boys sitting inconveniently on the steps and give them an eager wave. Usually, they ignored him. Some kids gave him a smile and asked ‘*You’re the new guy, right?*’ which Richie responded to with ‘*You bet your fur.*’

Floor three was somewhat busy, but not so bad. Richie could easily tell the halls would be full of activity on the weekends, when everyone was free to do whatever they wished. With it being a Monday though, most kids were probably studying and keeping on top of the week’s load. Moving as he watched the numbers on the doors fly by, Richie wondered what his roommate would be like. He wasn’t someone who was particularly fussy about who they ended up with, but he was hoping for someone fun, who would be down to hang out in his free time. He wasn’t sure how long he’d be at McMannon, but a new friend was always something Richie welcomed with open arms. After all, he *loved* people, thrived off of getting to know others.

Eventually, Richie found the door that matched the number etched on his keycard. Carefully, he reached forward for the cool metal of the door handle and gave it an experimental turn. *Unlocked.* He sucked in a deep breath of air, preparing himself for his grand entrance, and swung the door wide open with gusto.

“*Honey, I’m hoo-oommeeee!*” He sang loudly, feeling the way his forceful pushing caused the door to *swoop* in the air. Richie was vaguely aware of the surprised yelp that rung through his ears. Once the door had been opened, he heard a *crash*, and his eyes almost immediately fluttered to the source of noise.

Lying in a heap on the floor was his roommate who had, apparently, jumped off of his bed like a startled cat that had only just discovered it had been sitting by a cucumber. Richie peered down at the body laid across the floor, hand still clutching the door handle, and felt a chorus of laughter bubble through his chest. He released the sound begging to escape and folded over, eyes pinched tight, as his stomach recoiled and hyena-like sounds left his body. He laughed and giggled, letting out horse gasps. Finally, he looked up and noticed his

roommate roll on to his back, wincing and huffing in wheezy sounds. He clutched at his arm tensely, and Richie saw that it was in a tight cast. *Oh fuck*, he thought, shutting up and screwing his lips tight. He was pretty sure that he had made an enemy of his roommate right away.

“Shit, are you okay?” He tried, rushing over to the boy, who had brought his knees up to his chest. His face was screwed painfully tight and Richie leaned down to kneel beside him just as he took something plastic out of his pocket and shook it vigorously. His breath was raspy, little whines filled his ears. The boy shoved the thing in his hand- an aspirator- into his mouth and puffed two, short breaths. His eyes were closed, and he gasped against the plastic as if it were some kind of painkiller. Maybe it was, Richie wasn’t really sure how asthma worked.

“If you’re going to kill me, at least finish my trig assignment.” He muttered, tucking the inhaler in his pocket and clutching at his arm again. His eyebrows furrowed in pain. Richie felt terribly guilty.

“I’m not going to kill you,” Richie started. The other boy finally pried his eyes open and stared back at him. For one, brief second his brain switched off, static ringing through his ears. He can’t help but stare back at those doe eyes, parted lips and little forehead wrinkles. He gulped harshly, swallowing his thoughts down and storing them for later; maybe when his roommate *wasn’t* in pain “You’re not hurt, are you?” The boy’s eyes narrowed, shooting Richie a deadly look.

“To shit I’m not hurt.” He responded, voice hissing. Richie looked back sheepishly: *fair enough*.

“Is now a bad time to tell you I’m your roommate?” He tried as he rubbed at the back of his neck. The other boy looked at him briefly, before gazing somewhere slightly off to the left. His hair was splayed out under his body, arranged in a way which was both messy and somehow neat at the same time. Richie looked at the freckles across his nose and forced himself to pry his gaze away, because *not now*.

“Shut the door.” He ordered, looking back up at Richie. In response, he coughed hard in to the crook of his elbow to distract his body

from blushing, nodding back at him. The boy visibly recoiled and looked disgusted at him.

“Yeah, okay.” He muttered and rose from his knees, walking over to the door and kicking it shut carefully. He looked dumbly at his luggage bag and realized that he had carelessly dropped it during the scramble. Turning around, he noticed that the boy had moved from the floor to his bed, and was tearing his fingers through his hair carefully to fix up the kinks.

“Is that how you normally enter rooms?” He asked, unimpressed. His face was flushed from falling, cheeks rose-tinted.

“No. Normally I use the window instead. It’s a much sneakier way to kill my roommate, but I was feeling creative.” His roommate’s facial expression didn’t waver.

“You must be a shit murderer, then. Because you made a helluva lot of noise.” Richie stared back at him, having to take a moment to register that he had made a joke. His facial expression was annoyed and his voice was thick with anything *other than* a playful tone.

“I’m Richie.” He offered, still standing dumbly by the door.

“Richie Tozier?”

“Yeah.”

“As in, that kid at assembly?”

“The one and only.” Richie exclaimed with a grin. The boy sighed, rubbed at his face with his hands and groaned.

“Why do I *always* get the worst roommates?”

“Ouch?” Richie tried. The boy shot him a look that he couldn’t quite decipher.

“I’m Eddie.” He said instead. Richie watched as the boy- Eddie- twisted his body back to the books he had splayed out on the bed.

Oh, he was studying before I barged in. Richie, for the first time since entering the room, looked around at what was now his dorm.

The room was nice and clean. Eddie's side was what Richie could only describe as the definition of organized. There was little-to-no mess, save for the scattered books surrounding him as he studied. Things were where they needed to be, and he hadn't thrown up any posters or anything like that. Richie looked over at the other side, what was his. It was painfully bare, begging him to draw on the walls and put the decorations he had accumulated over the years everywhere. The room itself was decent, not too big, but a reasonable enough size for roommates to be able to avoid each other if they wished. Richie got the idea that Eddie probably wasn't too keen on him, but he didn't have anything like that planned. Meeting people, talking to people, was something he loved, and his roommate had already become an intriguing enough person to him.

Richie dropped his bag on his bed and watched it bounce once before landing solidly, sitting beside it. He spent a short moment watching the way Eddie looked up at his open laptop and scribbled something written on his screen down in rapid, bird-like motions. A glance up, then down to write. *Up, down, up, down.*

"So," Richie began "You going to give me a tour?" He leant back on his hands.

"I'd rather not." Eddie simply replied, opening a textbook and writing something else down.

"Not very hospitable of you." Richie pointed out. Eddie scrunched up his nose cutely but continued to write.

"What am I, your grandma?"

"Nah, my grandma isn't nearly as cute as you," Eddie finally looked up and shot Richie a *'shut up'* look. Richie grinned. "I'm *boorreeddd.*" He added childishly.

"Then go for a walk." Eddie suggested coldly, looking back down at his notes. Richie sighed.

“I don’t know anyone, and what if I get killed?”

“Seems like a fair trade, since you tried to murder me.” Richie snorted, but noted the way a guilt panged in his chest.

“I didn’t mean to hurt you,” He added somewhat casually, despite the sincerity in that sentiment “But, in my defense, I didn’t know my roommate would be a cripple before walking in.” Eddie turned around and Richie gestured towards his cast.

“A broken arm is *not* crippling.”

“Debilitating?”

“Do you *ever* shut up?” Eddie asked, pushing his notes off of his lap as if to say ‘*Fine, I give up.*’

“Scientifically speaking, it’s impossible for me to shut up.”

“As if you’re interesting enough to even study.”

“Oof, that one *hurt*.” Richie joked, wincing playfully. He watched as Eddie’s lips threatened to tug in to a smile, but instead settled in a straight line.

“So what about that tour?” Richie asked, this time pulling out the slip that Mr. Vice had given him. Eddie leant forward to get a better look at the paper, squinting as he moved. Richie watched as his body threatened to topple over, feet subconsciously landing on the floor in preparation to dash across the room and catch him.

“Is this your way of saying I don’t really have a choice?” Richie grinned toothily.

“Pretty much.” With a grunt, Eddie closed his textbooks and rose from his bed.

“You *could’ve told me that*,” He moved towards the door nonetheless, twisting the handle open. “Come on.” He added, nodding over to

where he was standing. Eagerly, Richie leapt up and shoved his glasses further up his nose, carefully shutting the door behind them in an apology for leaving it open before.

Wordlessly, he followed, too busy getting a good look at Eddie to notice or complain about the fact that they had moved further up the dorm building, rather than out. Eddie wore the school shorts just above the knee, showing off his tan legs. His scratchy school jumper was a few sizes too big on him, and it dipped cutely at his hips. Eddie was, overall, a very small boy. From what Richie could gather, he probably measured up to his chin, but that was cute enough in itself. Richie tore his eyes away from Eddie's little legs, begging himself to *please not get a crush on his roommate*. God, that'd be torture. It's just that he was so *pretty*; he looked like he was straight out of a Disney cartoon, all soft lines. Of course, his attitude pretty much shattered the innocent illusion immediately, but when he was quiet he was painfully adorable.

Rather suddenly, Eddie stopped on his heels in front of a dorm door. Richie damn near tumbled over him and landed on a heap on the floor, but he saved it by stumbling over to the wall and leaning against it as coolly as he could muster. Eddie didn't care enough to notice, and he instead rapped his fist against the door. He crossed his arms and tapped his foot impatiently.

"Eds, I know this is great and all, but usually tour guides don't just--"

"That isn't my name." Eddie shot back, giving Richie a deadly look. In no time, the door was opened.

"Y-yeah?" He guy standing by the door asked, regarding Eddie. He was tall, only a couple inches smaller than Richie, and wore a pair of loose pajama pants with a graphic tee. On impulse, he smiled, because *same, dude. I'd get out of my uniform as soon as I could, too*.

"Hey Bill, is Stanley inside?"

"Yeah, I'll go gr-gruh-grab him," Finally, Bill turned to the left and noticed Richie pressed against the wall, shooting him an amused smile "You're the nuh- new guy." He pointed out. Richie grinned

back.

“And you’re the cool guy, I assume.” Bill shook his head, laughing a little.

“Far from i-it. I luh-liked what you s-said in front of the scu- school, by the w-way. Personally, I would’ve gone with *Luh-Love Island Contestant*, but bachelor is a close se-second.”

“God, don’t encourage him.” Eddie snapped in response, a smile painted across his face.

“He’s your roommate?” Bill asked. Eddie glanced at Richie, regarding him, and looked back to his friend.

“Unfortunately. Hey, could you get Stan please?” He repeated kindly. Bill nodded and turned around, leaving the door half ajar.

“He’s cool.” Richie noted, gesturing to where Bill had been with his thumb.

“Too cool for you, anyway.” Eddie added coldly. Richie leant against the wall and clutched at his heart, swooning as if he’d been shot.

“You hurt me.” For the first time, Eddie’s lips pulled up in to a tight smile. Richie’s heart skipped a beat and he analyzed the warmth on his face, the smile *directed at him*, drinking it up.

“Hey, Eddie. What’s up?” Eddie turned towards the voice, and his smile doubled in size. Richie looked back, too, noticing the boy who had replaced Bill in the doorway. He was still in uniform, as neatly and correctly as possible, and his hair was a curly, light brown.

“I’m giving my roommate a tour, and I was wondering if you wanted a coffee while we’re out?” Eddie asked.

“Yes *please*. Could you grab one for Bill while you’re at it?” Eddie snorted, Richie felt a lump in his throat.

“Sure, I’ll be your *errand boy* for your *date*.”

"Shut up," The boy responded, his face painted red, he looked up at Richie apologetically "I'm Stanley" He muttered, embarrassed.

"Nice to meet you."

"I hated your thing on the stage, by the way." He added, this time more composed and frank. Richie laughed.

"Thanks for the constructive criticism." Stanley smiled back, a surefire sign that he was being friendly enough.

"We hated it." Eddie corrected, giving Stanley a knowing look. He rolled his eyes. Richie could tell, just watching the two of them, that they were close: the kind of friends who could have a conversation with their eyes.

"So you both hate me, then?" Richie jokingly asked.

"Yes." Stanley and Eddie answered in unison, like a pair of psychically linked twins. Richie laughed through his nose, Stanley smiled and Eddie shot a half-grin at the both of them. It was a moment shared between the three that Richie felt a need to cherish, to actively store in his memory, as if he was aware of a friendship forming just as it was happening in front of his eyes. Eddie and Stanley shared a similar level of sass, but Richie kind of *loved it*, the way they clicked together and snarkily snapped at him. *Interesting people*, Richie thought effortlessly.

"See you, Stan." Eddie said with a wave, breaking Richie's thoughts and moving to walk down the hall wordlessly. He looked dumbly from Eddie, to Stanley and back to Eddie, before rushing to hurry up. Eddie moved as if he didn't really care that much if Richie followed, and it was both *obnoxious* as all shit and something he was wildly attracted to. Richie lined up next to Eddie, heading down the stairs, and wiggled his eyebrows at him.

"Stanley and Bill...?" He started. Clearly, the insinuation of that question was enough, because Eddie shook his head and laughed softly.

“No,” He began, *they’re not together* “And that’s all I’ll say on that matter, because I’m a good friend.” He added with conviction. Richie noticed the serious glint in his eyes and decided to avoid pressing the matter further. Eddie *did* seem like a decent friend, one who would take your secrets with him to the grave. Trying his best to pry his eyes from staring across at his pretty face, Richie wondered if he’d eventually be lucky enough to have Eddie, this snappy little gremlin, as a friend too.

“This is the cafeteria,” Eddie pointed out, walking Richie in to a large room adorned with tables “We eat at 7am, dinner is at 6pm.”

“Where do you sit, Eds?” Richie asked, peering over him and inside. Eddie scoffed.

“First, don’t call me that. Second, real smooth, but you’re not sitting with us.” He crossed his arms, Richie winced in response.

“Why *not*?”

“You’re annoying.” He simply answered with a shrug. Richie let out a frustrated puff of air. He didn’t struggle to make friends often, so sitting next to someone wouldn’t *really* be an issue but, if he was being entirely honest, he was *wounded*. Eddie, to put it plainly, was *cute* and fun to hang around, so the idea of *already* being pushed away stung. Of course, he didn’t indicate this at all.

“Where does Beverly sit?” He asked instead, remembering the girl he had met before.

“Beverly Marsh?”

“Maybe? The red haired girl.” Eddie clicked his tongue and peered in the room, pointing vaguely towards the back wall.

“Over there with Bill and some other friends,” He peered back at Richie curiously “How do you know Beverly?”

“Spoke to me after assembly. Why, you *jealous*?” Eddie rolled his eyes casually, a half-bothered action.

“More just feel sorry for her. She must have *really low* standards.” He shot out. Richie grinned. Eddie was quickly becoming *very irresistible* whenever he tried to be mean. Gulping hard to distract himself from his twisting stomach, Richie trailed out the room behind Eddie.

“Got any interesting stories from the cafeteria? Food fights?” Eddie looked vaguely over his shoulder, not quite meeting Richie’s gaze, and spoke as he walked with a deadpan expression across his face.

“This one time I went in for toast and I found that there were pancakes instead.” Richie snorted.

“If that’s the best you’ve got, then this school must be *very boring*.” Eddie looked back ahead, and Richie could’ve *sworn* he saw his shoulders shake softly from a quiet laugh.

“Sometimes, yeah. Sometimes, no.” Richie furrowed his brows. *Cryptic*.

The rest of the supposed ‘tour’ went similarly: Eddie twisted and turned around the halls with a practiced efficiency while Richie stumbled behind and tried his best to get a smile out of him (He didn’t quite succeed. If anything, he annoyed the poor kid more, but his exasperated sighs and furrowed eyebrows did *something* to Richie, so he teased it out more anyway) Eddie would show Richie a room, give him a short run down of the rules and roll his eyes at whatever comments were shot his way, moving on to the next attraction like a disengaged worker at a fun fair. Eventually, they found themselves pushing open a set of wide doors, entering a large, theatre-like auditorium. Richie was stunned speechless, mouth hanging agape. The place wasn’t necessarily *massive*, but it certainly seemed expensive and had all the works: lighting rigs, built in audience seating, a *really fucking big stage*.

“So this is the auditorium-” Eddie began, turning to Richie and snorting once he got a look at his stunned facial expression “don’t tell me that *this* is what shuts you up.” Richie blinked and adjusted his glasses, practically *feeling* the way theatre nerd seeped out of his pores.

“This is a really good set up.” He simply replied.

“What are you, a music kid or something?” Richie opened his mouth to reply, but Eddie cut him off “No, you couldn’t be. Music would require you to actually *sit still and shut up*.” Richie looked at Eddie, the way his lips perked up in a playful smile, and felt his heart actually *melt*. He coughed lightly to clear the bewilderment and awe stuck in his throat.

“Eddie, dear,” He began, feeling his composure come back to him as he looked around the room “I am a *thespian*.”

“Why am I not surprised?”

“Because I radiate talent and charisma?”

“Crackhead energy, more like.” Eddie retorted, grinning wide. Richie fiddled with his glasses and noted the whiteness of his teeth.

“I heard they don’t do drama here.” He watched as Eddie shrugged.

“Yeah.”

“Do you know why?” Mr. Vice had said *lack of interest*. But Richie could tell, was almost certain, that there was something else. His answer was too fast, too practiced, as if there was another missing piece which had been swept under the rug. Of course, Richie could’ve easily been reading too far in to the matter, but he was *annoyed*. Annoyed that he couldn’t take the *one subject* that made him feel alive, made him happy. And when Richie got annoyed, he became nosy and *persistent*.

“I really don’t know.” Eddie responded. Richie smiled back at him. *Right. Probably not the best person to ask, then.*

“Where to next?” He tried instead, encouraging Eddie to speak. While the whole *drama mystery* was something he was intent on figuring out, hearing Eddie’s voice, watching the way his mouth moved when he talked, was kind of something he was *more interested in*. Richie shook away the voice in the back of his head that screamed alarm bells, told him *stop stop stop*. Because yeah, okay, having a crush on your roommate was *never good news*. Roommates sleep in the same room and change in close quarters; Richie wasn’t exactly keen on spending his time at McMannon listening to the way his roommate breathed or blushing every time he was *near* him. But, then again, he wondered what the harm really was? He didn’t really *know* Eddie that well, so of course he didn’t have a crush. He just thought the kid was cute. Was there any harm in that, any harm in just *looking*? He thought Beverly was gorgeous, too, so same difference.

“Library?” Eddie asked, as if saying ‘*shall we?*’ He flipped the lights off in the auditorium and walked forward. Richie made a conscious effort to tear his eyes away from his legs.

Richie Tozier, he told himself, don’t you dare start pining for your roommate. If you do, you’ll be doomed.

Richie made a point of getting a *thorough* tour of the school. While the two of them walked the halls, Richie pointed out every door and asked ‘*what’s in here?*’ For the first few minutes, Eddie answered honestly, until he realized that his roommate was going to ask about, quite literally, *every single door* until they made their way to where they were going.

“What’s behind here?” Richie asked, gesturing towards a room to his left.

“I don’t know, Richie.” Eddie answered mildly.

“Well you’re a crappy tour guide, then.” He responded, reaching over to twist the door handle.

“I’m not a tour guide, I’m an unfortunate student who was forced to give his frankly *annoying* roommate a brief overview of the school.”

“Yeah, yeah, you tell yourself that, Eddie.” Richie pushed the door open to reveal a small janitors closet, stocked with cleaning products and various other miscellaneous items of no real interest.

“It’s a janitor’s closet,” Eddie deadpanned “let’s go.”

“No, no. I want a full review of this closet.” Richie persisted, wagging a finger around dramatically. Eddie huffed and placed his hands on his hips. It was, in every sense of the word, *adorable*.

“It’s a closet. Cleaning shit is in there. Let’s go.” He grabbed vaguely for Richie’s arm and dragged him across the halls until he was sure that he was no longer pulling his weight. Richie followed behind Eddie dumbly, feeling the warmth of his fingers long after they had left his wrist. He pushed his glasses up his nose as a distraction.

“I should give you a review, Eds-“

“Not my name.” Eddie snapped back, hardly turning around. Richie grinned.

“*Riveting stuff,*” He began in a pompous, rich British voice “*Ten out of ten, I’ve never seen a more attractive tour guide in my life.*”

“Firstly, I don’t know what the fuck you’re talking about and secondly, that’s the worst voice I’ve ever heard.”

“I’ll have you know that I’m going to be *famous* for my voices one day.” Eddie snorted and turned back to Richie, giving an unconvinced look.

“Yeah, okay.”

“You just don’t know talent when you see it.”

“This is the *second* time you’ve called yourself talented.” Richie sped up his walking so he joined beside Eddie.

“That’s because I’m so talented that it needs to be said twice.”

“Just so you know, being talented and irritating aren’t the same thing.”

Eventually, they made their way to a small communion in the main building. It was a large, open space, adored with soft couches and beanbags. The room wasn’t full, really, but enough people were inside to indicate that it was a popular meet up spot in the school. Richie tried his absolute hardest not to cream his pants when he noticed a ps4 console attached to a TV. It called for him, cried ‘*Richieeee, I have so many unbeaten high scooreeeess.*’ He knew for a fact that he’d get acquainted to whatever games McMannon offered in no time.

“This is where the seniors hang.” Eddie explained, walking through the room and weaving in between friendship groups as he made his way to a small kettle positioned against a wall. Richie followed with a grin, leaning coolly against the counter beside Eddie while he got to work.

“Know anyone here?” Richie asked, looking across at the various seniors inside. Eddie hummed, spooning sugar into a couple of disposable cups before turning around to scan the room.

“I know of some kids. Most of my friends would be studying,” Richie scoffed, *of course*. Eddie didn’t seem to notice “want one?” He asked. Richie looked over to Eddie.

“Darlin’” He drawled in a thick Texan accent “I’m *parched*.”

“I regret even asking.” None the less, Eddie grabbed at another cup.

“No sugar, three heaped spoons of coffee.” Richie absently instructed. Eddie snorted.

“You’re serious?”

“Yeah?”

“You’ll get a fucking heart attack.” Richie’s lips curled in to a smile.

“Naw~ Are you worried about me, Eds?” He grabbed at Eddie’s cheeks with his fingers and gave them a gentle pinch. In response, Eddie batted him away.

“Touch me and I’ll fucking kill you.” He warned, shooting daggers at Richie.

“Kinky.” He winked. In response, Eddie turned around and scooped *two* spoonfuls of coffee into a cup. Richie tried his best not to notice, or think about the fact that the gesture of reducing a spoonful suggested that he cared for his health. *The kid’s just proving a point. Get a grip, Richie.*

The kettle made a small clicking sound, indicating that the water had boiled. Eddie leant over awkwardly to grab at it in a motion which suggested he usually used the hand which was restrained in a cast. As he lifted the kettle, his hand wobbled dangerously, wrist weak under the weight.

“Let me.” Richie offered, reaching over to grab the handle. For one, tantalizing second, their fingers brushed. Eddie’s skin was soft. Richie gulped and focused on the solid plastic of the kettle’s handle.

“Thanks.” Eddie muttered, pulling his hand away as if Richie’s skin had burnt him. Richie gave him a smile.

“Did you break your writing arm?” He asked, pouring boiling water in to the cups messily.

“Watch it, you’ll get a burn,” Eddie started absently before looking down at his broken arm “Yeah, it gets in the way sometimes.” He added. Richie placed the kettle back on the counter and leant away from Eddie to grab some milk from the cheap communal fridge.

“When do you get it off?”

“Just under two weeks.” Richie sloppily uncapped the milk and poured the white liquid into the cups, spilling half of it across the counter in the process. Richie ignored the mess, because it was

normal for him. Sometimes he just couldn't help it; he had a bad habit of doing *everything* a little too vigorously, so some spillage was kind of expected. Eddie tutted none the less and grabbed for a cloth, mopping it up as Richie put the milk away. It wasn't really a big gesture, but the pure *domestic-ness* of Eddie cleaning up after him was enough to send Richie's heart racing. He grabbed for two of the three cups and absently sipped at his, relishing the way the liquid burned his throat. It was good, a distraction much needed. He watched as Eddie reached over for the third cup and moved away.

"You don't like coffee?" He asked, having noticed that Eddie made three cups: One for Stanley, one for Bill and one for him. He followed Eddie out the room as they talked.

"Too bitter." He simply responded, backtracking towards their dorms. Richie struggled to keep up, as he had since their tour had begun. It was funny; Eddie had such short little legs but by God, did they *move*.

"Of *course* you're a sweet tooth."

"What's that supposed to mean?" Richie shrugged.

"Cute guys normally like sweet things, makes sense."

"I am *not* cute." Eddie retorted. Richie snorted a laugh and gave his roommate a gentle shoulder-check. Eddie recoiled from the contact and carefully moved the cup in his hand so it didn't slop.

"Tell your *cute little freckles* that."

"Shut up, I swear to God, or I'll strangle you in your sleep." Eddie spat out, voice icy cold.

"How did you know I had a suffocation kink!?"

"Gross."

"Did your mom tell you? Because, y'know, her and I-"

"Gross, Richie."

If there was one thing Richie missed about *home*, remembered about *home*, it was snacks and junk food. Boarding schools served food which were an assault to the senses; in comparison, a Twinkie was fine wine. Standing behind Eddie in the queue, because he had practically begged that they go to the cafeteria together (*'You're still not sitting with us' 'Just keep me company on the way there, pur-leaasee?' 'If you shut up, then fine.'*), Richie tried his best not to gag as the lunch lady ladled a pile of what could only be described as *goop* on to his plate.

"Five course meal, this is." He joked to Eddie, moving across the line with his tray. Eddie huffed.

"Doesn't need to be tasty as long as it has all the food groups." Richie wrinkled his nose and stuck out his tongue.

"What a sad life you live."

"A *healthy* life." He corrected, moving away from Richie with his plate. Eddie tossed him a glance, a kind of half-bated apology mixed with a warning *not* to follow him to his table. Richie sighed and shuffled across the room as confidently as he could muster, eyes darting around to find a telltale glint of red hair.

"Try not to look too luh-lost." Someone whispered behind him. If it weren't for the stutter, he would have been terrified, certain someone was trying to murder him in the middle of the cafeteria.

"The thing is, Bill," He started, twisting around and confirming his suspicions. Bill smiled back at him "I'm not lost, I'm just misplaced." He offered pathetically. Bill shook his head, a bemused expression painted cross his face.

"I-if you're not lost, then why d-do you look luh-like my shoe th-tha-

that one time I found it in the lost and f-found box?" Richie's lip quivered as he broke out into an infectious smile.

"Touché, my good sir." He muttered in his (absolutely brilliant and spot on) British voice, the posh one.

"Sit w-with me." It didn't sound like a request or even a suggestion; rather, it was an order. Richie nodded, still smiling, because *why would he say no?* Bill led him across the cafeteria with a simmering confidence, which bounced off of him and right into Richie's heart. Any fears of sitting alone immediately withdrew from his body. They made their way to the back and Bill slid across a bench-like chair. Richie followed suit. The table seemed mostly unbothered by the new addition; those sitting across from the boys continued their conversations as if Richie barely existed.

"How was the tour?" Bill asked, voice cutting through the silence (Or, rather, lack of conversation. The room wasn't exactly *quiet*, Richie's ears were ringing with the murmur of hundreds of different conversations).

"It was alright. McMannon is a pretty big school, almost bigger than my-

"Bill, you stole my new friend." Richie looked up, ears just about perking like a dog's from the familiarity of that voice. He grinned when he caught sight of Beverly, who was now wearing a casual dress. *I like Bill and Beverly*, he absently thought, *they hate the uniform and that's fucking relatable*.

"You met?" Bill asked, shuffling across so Beverly could squeeze between the two boys. With a hop, she landed on the seat and smacked her tray down, turning to Richie and pulling her arm around his shoulders in a chummy half-hug.

"Yep!" Richie grinned, noticing how Beverly's perfume was pretty and flowery.

"Just so you know, I whacked one out for you after assembly." Rather than recoil, Beverly shot him a wink, smirking.

“You’re a freak.”

“I bet you like that.”

“I’m luh-literally r-right here.” Bill commented, spooning the excuse for ‘food’ on his plate into his mouth.

“Sorry, Billy boy. Things getting too hot and heavy for you?” Richie asked, Beverly’s arm still lazily swung around his shoulder.

“Shh, Bill. The adults are talking.” They both, in unison, laughed when Bill made a gagging noise. Eventually, Beverly pulled away and slopped some food in to her mouth. She watched the way Richie’s nose wrinkled and laughed.

“It’s not so bad. Tastes better than it looks.”

“There’s a joke to be made about my wang there.” Richie added, looking down at the brown sludge on his plate.

“Please, duh-don’t m-make it.” Richie smiled and tentatively took his spoon in to his hand.

He’d had his share of shitty boarding school meals before, but usually his dinner actually *looked* edible. He twisted in his chair, searching through the cafeteria for Eddie. In no time, his eyes hit the kid, who was talking to Stanley and another one of his friends- a kind looking, round boy. He ate his food while laughing softly at something someone had said. Richie tweaked his glasses nervously and turned away, ignoring the way his cheeks burned after watching the *beauty* that was Eddie laughing. He shoved his food in to his mouth and chewed vigorously- If Eddie was eating it, his roommate who had complained about germs a good fifty times to him already, it couldn’t be *so bad*. And really, it wasn’t. It tasted meaty, maybe a bit too gamey for his liking, but it was edible. He’d eaten worse happily (one time a pizza slice had fallen in the bin and he dished it out like it was nothing).

“You excited to start classes?” Beverly asked, knocking her ankles

against Richie's affectionately.

"Oh boy," Richie squeaked in a nerdy voice "*by golly jeez, I sure am!*" Beverly laughed through her nose and gave Richie an amused slap on the arm.

"So that's a no."

"A hard no."

"Sit with me?" Beverly asked.

"In class?"

"Yes, dumbass. In class." Richie looked up and grinned wide.

"How could I say no to a pretty face?" Bill nudged Beverly gently, gesturing over to a nearby table.

"Guh-Georgie." He muttered. Richie watched as Beverly's eyebrows furrowed and he followed her gaze to where she was looking. A kid, one of the first years, was talking to a senior with a *God-awful mullet*.

"What's happening?" He asked, feeling a little left out.

"Bill's brother is talking to a *prick*." Beverly muttered. Richie nodded and looked back to the altercation. The boy- Bill's brother- nodded, and the older kid (a *'prick'*) walked away, his shoulders threatening and square.

"I'll puh-punch him if he did anything." Bill's jaw tightened as he stood from his table and walked over to his brother. Beverly shot Richie a look.

"Come on." She muttered, rising from her seat and grabbing for Richie's wrist. He let her lead him over to where Bill was headed, sneaking a glance at Eddie's table. Their eyes met, and Eddie immediately looked away. *He was watching.*

"Just some money, Bill." The kid muttered once he was in earshot.

“You guh-gave it to him?”

“Yeah.” Bill leant over and held his brother’s shoulders gently, reassuringly.

“Next time, tuh-tell me. I’ll d-deal with it.” The kid nodded, and Bill ruffled his hair playfully.

“Bill!” He giggled, pulling away. Richie felt his heart sink with bitter-sweetness. He had always wanted a sibling, so he couldn’t help but feel a little jealous.

“This is Ruh-Richie.” Bill explained, gesturing over to him. Richie grinned and waved.

“I’m Georgie,” The kid explained, waving kindly “nice to meet you.”

“You too, kid. Like your shirt, by the way.” Georgie looked down at his Nirvana shirt and smiled wider.

“I like your nails.” He retorted, exchanging compliments. Richie had forgotten that he hadn’t taken off his chipped, black nail polish. He grinned down at his nails dumbly.

“I could give you some polish if you’d like.” Georgie grinned.

“Could you?” Richie nodded. Bill laughed and gave his brother a hug.

“See you luh-later, Georgie.”

“Okay, Bill. I love you.” Bill grinned.

“Love you too.” He responded without a second’s hesitation, anything other than embarrassed. Richie loved that, loved family members who just unabashedly shared affection. He had always wanted that for himself, but obviously that wasn’t something his parents were going to provide, so he took the opportunity to vicariously live through Bill and Georgie for a moment, his heart warming.

“See you, kiddo.” Beverly muttered, turning back to the table, hand still attached to Richie.

“What was that about?” He asked Bill.

“Henry Buh-Bowers stuh-stole Georgie’s allowance muh-money.” He explained. Richie nodded, swallowing thickly.

“I’ll *kill him*.” Beverly muttered through a tight jaw. Bill gave her a playful smack on the shoulder, a ‘*thank you*’ mixed with a ‘*don’t you dare*’, and slid back in to his place at their table. Richie looked back over to Georgie, who seemed like a sweet enough kid, and felt his stomach bubble. He hated bullies. After all, he was a punching bag when he was the kid’s age, too. He found himself agreeing with Beverly. If this guy- Henry Bowers- got in their way, hurt any one of them, he’d probably bury the body with her.

Richie rummaged through his bag and looked for a pair of pajamas, hair dripping like a wet dog’s coat. He had only *just* come out of the shower, and his bare back was already slick with water. Eddie was sitting across the room, nose practically mashed against his book as he typed something furiously on his laptop. He paid Richie little attention, and hadn’t turned around since he entered the room (there had been an awfully awkward moment where he stared at Richie’s bare chest, but it passed soon enough when he made a comment about the door being opened too loudly). As Richie questioned whether or not he wanted to wear his Star Wars shirt or black ACDC one, the silence was broken.

“You still haven’t unpacked?” Eddie asked. Richie turned around and stared back at his big, doe eyes.

“Not yet, *mom*.” Eddie rolled his eyes and puffed out air from his lips: an annoyed gesture. Richie wasn’t certain, but he could’ve *sworn* he saw his eyes flutter across his bare chest, eying the water droplets

falling across his shoulders, for a brief moment.

Great, Richie. So you've got a crush on your roommate and you're projecting? Now you're really fucked.

Richie pushed his thoughts away, shoving his glasses up his nose.

"I could help, if you want." Eddie offered, body twisting in his chair in an effort to speak to Richie.

"Once I'm dressed, Eds."

"For the hundredth time, that isn't my name and it never will be." He retorted, spinning back on his chair and writing in to his notebook. Richie grinned at the back of his head and, after much effort, eventually found an ACDC shirt and clean pair of boxers. As he dressed, he felt a telltale heaviness on his back, the kind of weight that indicated being watched. But he must've been mistaken, because when he turned around, shirt half over his head, all he saw was Eddie furiously typing something on his laptop, the *clackity clack's* that his fingers made against the keyboard filling the room. *Had he been typing before?* He wasn't sure. Richie turned his gaze away from Eddie's soft ears and pulled his shirt over his head with a rough tug.

"Thou art decent." He declared. Eddie turned around as he spoke.

"Will you ever stop with the fucking-" His throat caught when he looked at Richie. Coughing hard, he tried again "Voices."

"What?" Richie asked, noticing the dumb expression on Eddie's face. *Was there a stain on his shirt or something?*

"Don't you own any pants?" He tried, eying Richie's legs. Richie looked down himself, staring at his thick, black leg hairs.

"My sexy legs got you all hot and bothered?" He asked, kicking out a leg for good measure. Eddie rolled his eyes and rose from his seat.

"Y'know, it's usually considered *polite* to wear pants." He walked over to Richie's bed, peering in to his bag. Richie watched as he

rummaged through absently, then suddenly jumped away as if he had found a spider in there.

“What?”

“*Seriously?*” Eddie asked, reaching in carefully to pull out a packet of condoms. Richie snorted.

“What are you, five?” He asked, walking over and snatching the plastic packet from his roommate. Eddie wrinkled his nose.

“If you do *any of that* in here, I swear to God-“

“You’ll kill me, yeah yeah.” Richie finished, sifting through his stuff to find his underwear. Once he had a good pile of boxers, he walked over to his dresser and threw them lazily in to the drawer.

“You aren’t going to fold those?”

“No point.” Richie said with a shrug. In response, Eddie pulled out a shirt, one he would *drown in* if he wore it (*why are you thinking about that, Richie?*), and folded it carefully.

“If you’re going to be my roommate, you have to be clean.” He explained, folding up another shirt and placing it atop the other.

Richie tried his best not to think about how Eddie looked like *such a wife*.

Eddie fell asleep as soon as he went to bed. He breathed heavily in his sleep.

Richie spent most of the night thinking that the little whines he made in the dark were *adorable*.

A topic much debated amongst boarding schools had always been mobile phones. Some schools that Richie attended didn't mind phones in class too much, but it quickly became apparent that McMannon was on the other side of that debate. Eddie explained the rules briefly on their way to breakfast, but it was Bill who really filled him in on the details. Phones absolutely *were not* allowed during school hours. Every morning, kids would sign in to school for the day by lining up through the halls and waiting for whichever unfortunate teacher who was on duty to tick them off a list. Then, they would write their name on a sticker, which was placed on their phone before being promptly dropped into a year-designated plastic box, along with everyone else's.

"Muh-Make sure your ph-phone is on silent. Show the tuh-t-teacher before handing it over." Bill had suggested kindly, chasing his sentence down with a hearty gulp of orange juice.

"That'd be a riot! Can you imagine, sorting through a hundred phones for the buzzing one?" Richie asked with a snort, imaging a teacher frantically sorting through a sea of phones and throwing shit left and right to get to whichever one had been left on.

"And you can't 'leave your phone in your dorm' every day, they keep tabs." Beverly added.

The teachers made you turn out your pockets before leaving. When Beverly explained this to Richie, she shot him a wink. He had been confused as to why, but he only had to wait a good thirty minutes to find out why, to become aware of her mischievous ways.

Walking through the halls alongside an abundance of other students, Beverly and Richie strolled towards a lengthy but quickly passing queue. They walked close to the walls, which was another *curious* thing that Beverly had insisted on. As they made their way over, maybe two or three feet away from the line, Beverly grabbed at his jumper and tugged Richie through a hidden nook between two lockers, shimmying both of them back into the darkness of their hiding place.

“Beverly, if you wanted to make out you could’ve just-“

“Hold that thought.” Beverly muttered, pulling her phone out of her skirt pocket and carefully pushing it through the neck of her shirt. Richie watched anxiously, unsure of where it was appropriate to look when a girl had her hand down her shirt, as Beverly stuck her tongue out in concentration and nestled her phone in the cup of her bra.

“Can you tell?” She asked, twisting to the side so Richie could get a look at her profile. Richie shook his head, laughing under his breath, and pulled his phone from his pocket, pulling the waistline of his pants out.

“You’re going to get breast cancer.” He muttered, throwing his phone down his boxers. He tried his best not to jerk when the cold glass of his phone pressed against his dick.

“Like that ever stopped me.”

“I have to admit Beverly,” Richie began, letting go of his pants and watching as the elastic painfully snapped against his hip “I never use my phone. I’m literally just doing this to impress you.” Beverly laughed breathily.

“Colour me impressed, Tozier. I only bring my phone so when it buzzes against my boob, I know it’s time to get my smuggled shit.” Beverly started, peeking around the corner to make sure a teacher wouldn’t watch them leave. Richie wasn’t sure if Beverly was joking or being serious about the whole ‘smuggling’ thing.

“Or give someone a blowy, depending on the time of the day,” Beverly snapped him a look, something he couldn’t quite decipher but had a hint of offense and anger stirring in there “just me?” He quickly added in an attempt to lighten the mood and wipe away whatever *that look* was on her face. Beverly’s taut brows softened and she chuckled a laugh, grabbing at his sweaty hand and pulling him along.

“Come on, idiot.” Trailing through the busy halls, leaning over

Beverly as they lined up to be checked for phones, Richie whispered in her ear.

“Here’s to hoping my phone doesn’t accidentally snap any dick pics throughout the day.”

“Like anyone would care to see them.”

Beverly, it turned out, had almost every class with Richie, which was, to say the least, a merciful coincidence. Comparing timetables sent a tidal wave of absolute glee through his chest, since there was nothing he hated more than having no one to talk to for copious amounts of time. It wasn’t long until Beverly picked up on this herself. At first she responded to Richie’s incessant talking with a series of ‘*uhuh*’s, but those quickly turned in to ‘*shut up, Richie*’ s. He, of course, *tried* to shut up, but that had never been something he was exactly good at. Suddenly, something would pop in his head, and he’d be rambling all over again. Eventually, Beverly seemed to give up, quickly training herself to take notes and listen to him at the same time.

By the first week, Beverly had begun taking two sets of notes, writing at a million miles a minute to keep up with the teacher. Richie had only caught on when Beverly tore a series of pages from her notebook and handed them over to him. He stopped mid-way through a spiel about the stupidity of horror movie characters when this occurred, and peered across the page. *Richie Tozier* was written carefully in the margin. Beverly’s handwriting was neat, close together, almost even timid (which was a funny thing to think, considering Beverly had proven herself to be anything *other than* shy).

“What’s this?” Richie asked.

“Notes.” She simply responded, shrugging and turning back to her notebook, filling out a worksheet which had been handed to them. Richie scrunched up his nose in confusion, paper pinched between his slender fingers.

“Bev,” He began. Beverly turned her head around and seemed to *preen* at the nickname “I’ll never use these.” He explained. It was true, he wouldn’t. Richie hadn’t taken notes or studied for tests in *years*. He never really had to; even without paying attention, things seemed to stick, and he’d always scraped through class with C’s and B’s easily.

“Just take it.”

“I won’t use these.” He repeated, gesturing towards the pages. He knew she was trying to help him, but he didn’t want her to waste her time writing things down when they wouldn’t be used.

“Well, then just consider it practice for when I give you a hand-job after class.” She muttered, shrugging coyly. Looking down at her neat handwriting, he felt a warmth settle in his heart. Sure, he probably wouldn’t look over her writing, but the gesture was sweet.

“Beverly Marsh, is that an offer?” He spluttered smugly instead, grinning wide when she rolled her eyes.

“You wish, virgin.” She retorted, idly leaning over to doodle a smiley face on Richie’s papers. He looked down dumbly. It was a friendly gesture and he admired it greatly. It would take him a long time to admit it, and certainly he wasn’t considering this in that moment, but Beverly was probably already the closest friend he’d ever had. He had only known her for a week, and she was closer to Richie than his parents would *ever* be to him.

Eddie, much to Richie’s disappointment, only had one class with him: English. When he and Beverly walked into their first English lesson, practically hand in hand, Richie’s eyes had immediately fluttered to his roommate, as if they were trained to find him. Eddie was sitting at a desk pressed against the wall, sorting through a bag in his lap and pulling out a perfectly labelled stack of books. *Of course he’s*

organized, Richie thought. Walking towards him, Richie shot Beverly a wink as if to say '*found my seat*'. Beverly grinned back and trailed behind. He made his way down the row, eying the spot next to his friend, when Eddie's gaze fluttered up (the gesture was soft, almost as if in slow motion, and Richie *definitely* choked at the boy's pure beauty) and they made eye contact. Richie shot him a friendly grin. Eddie, in response, rather aggressively dumped the bag in his lap on the empty chair behind him, throwing visual daggers across the room. Richie swatted them away with an embarrassed wink. He followed Beverly to a table a few rows behind, feeling somewhat stung. Eddie hadn't wanted to sit with him, he made *that* clear enough.

Eventually, his disappointment and upset simmered away when Richie noticed Stanley, the curly-haired boy who sat with Eddie in the cafeteria, slide in to the seat next to him naturally and smoothly. *Oh*, Richie thought, feeling dumb, *it's Stanley's seat*. He felt far less stung by the thought of having almost taken someone else's seat rather than Eddie simply hating him so much that the idea of them sitting together repulsed him. As Richie tore a page from his notebook (which he was sure would probably stay mostly empty for the whole year), he tried his best not to think about how pathetic he was, actually getting upset over being unable to sit next to Eddie. *Like a dog with a tail between its legs*, he considered, scrawling messily onto the paper with a leaky pen. Grinning at his handiwork, he eagerly folded the paper in two. *Eddie*, he wrote on the front in horrible, messy handwriting. Beverly elbowed him, smiling wide.

"Passing notes in class, really?" She whispered over the teacher's voice. Richie rolled his eyes, turning to look at Eddie as he rose his hand in response to a question which had been asked.

"The use of casual language attracts a modern audience." He suggested, the teacher grinned.

"That's right, Mr. Kaspbrak." Eddie *beamed* and it was enough to make Richie's stomach do flips. He opened up his paper and showed it to Beverly. He had drawn a dick with disturbing detail.

"A dick for a dick." He explained in a hushed tone.

“First day of school and you’re already bullying the poor kid?” She asked, Richie shook his head.

“He did it to himself, teacher’s pet.” He grinned for good measure, to get his innocent joke across. Beverly chuckled breathily and turned her attention to the teacher. She hadn’t for a second considered Richie as a genuine bully, and she understood his joke just fine.

When the teacher turned around, Richie took his chance and stretched a long, pale arm out to his right. The student across from him peered at the paper in his hand, considered his request to take it, and gently pried the paper from his fingers. When the teacher turned around, Richie snapped his arm back with dangerous haste, watching as his note was passed down the row and to his unsuspecting victim. Richie stared at the back of Eddie’s neck (that enticing, soft patch of skin) as he opened the note. Pretty immediately, he snapped around and shot a glare over to him, face flushed and embarrassed. Richie could feel a heat pooling in his stomach at the redness painted across his roommate’s face. He crossed his legs, just to be careful (popping a stiffy in class wasn’t exactly something Richie wanted him to notice).

Class continued. Eddie answered questions and Richie watched him intently while half-talking to Beverly.

“Hey there, lovebird. Don’t you know it’s polite to look at people when they’re talking?”

“Huh?” Richie enquired, turning back to Beverly. She snorted a laugh.

“Quit staring, you’ll bore holes through his skull.” Richie huffed unconvincingly, as if to say *‘pff, I wasn’t staring’*. She cocked her brow at him, unconvinced.

“This guy’s a wanker.” Richie said instead, gesturing towards the printed article about some poet which was sitting on his desk. Beverly grinned.

“I like poetry, thank you very much.”

“Yeah, but ‘*Blue sunsets reflect my sparkling violet eyes*’, really?” Richie tried, quoting the poem beneath him.

“Wanker sure is a good word for him,” She mused “he probably had to whip it out for a solid hour after that one.”

“*Man, poetry sure does get me hard*’.” Richie added in a stoner, surfer-dude voice. Beverly snorted.

“*When I orgasm, I recite hamlet*’.” Beverly said in a posh-British voice. The surprise of her using a voice, which was something Richie only ever did and no one *ever* joined in with, was enough to send a series of deep chuckles out of him. His laughter filled the room, and some students turned around, distracted from their work. He didn’t care much, but tried to stifle his giggles when the teacher shot him a warning look.

“Beverly gets off a good one!” He finally announced, calming himself down with a series of composed breaths. Beverly grinned.

“Wasn’t that funny, dipshit.”

“*Oh, but it was, my dear*,” Richie began “you are a comedian’s wet dream.”

“I am flattered.” Beverly shot back, smiling as she went back to highlighting the sheet on her desk. Richie noticed a hand outstretched towards him and he turned, eying the note in one of his classmate’s hands. He gave her, a wiry looking girl with a tight ponytail, a polite grin as he took the paper.

‘*Richie*’, it read on the front in neat handwriting. Richie eagerly unfolded the paper, which had been carefully creased *four* (four!!) times. In comically small letters, right in the middle of the page, a note was written: *Could you shut the fuck up? I’m trying to study.* Richie looked up to find the note-writer, and his eyes immediately locked in on Eddie’s, who was grinning cockily at him. Next to him, Stanley was sending a serious glare. He looked down to Stanley’s hand, noticing the pen resting there. Of course, Stanley had written it.

Something about not knowing what Eddie's handwriting looked like sent a pang through his chest. To distract himself, Richie tore another page and scrawled '*you think I'm loud? You should've heard your mom last night*' and grinned as the classmate next to him took the paper. Eddie, with the new note in his hand, rolled his eyes at Richie as he handed it back to Stanley to read.

He was quiet until the lesson ended none the less.

Richie met Ben Hanscom in Maths. He and Beverly had trailed into the classroom together, intent on up-keeping the pattern of showing up to class side-by-side, when Beverly practically *ran* to an occupied table. She slid in to her seat coolly and gently tapped a boy sitting beside her, who was blushing furiously and smiling like an idiot. Richie followed, sliding in behind Beverly and next to Stanley.

"Does anyone sit here?" He asked, throwing his bag on the floor beside him.

"Someone does now," Stanley simply began, straightening out the books on his desk so they perfectly aligned with the edge "don't distract me."

"Impossible, Stan the Man." Richie retorted with a grin. Beverly spun around.

"It's true, Stanley. You're trapped." Stanley glanced at Richie icily.

"My own personal purgatory." He muttered, disappointment laced in his voice. Richie threw an arm around Stanley's shoulder and ruffled his hair, which earned a swift elbow to his chest. It left him winded, and Richie had to pull away to clutch at the area which would eventually bruise, but it was *totally worth it*.

"You got some fight in you." He muttered through a grin, rubbing absently at where he'd been hit. Stanley raked his fingers through his hair meticulously, ignoring him completely and looking ahead at the

whiteboard.

“Touch me, Tozier, and you lose your fingers.”

“You sound like Eddie-“

“Good, then he’s smart.” Stanley snapped back in a tone which wasn’t necessarily mean. It almost even seemed like friendly banter, if you squinted.

“Alright class,” the teacher at the front of the class began. Beverly spun around and watched while Stanley perked his already perfectly straight posture “today we will be looking at...” Richie let the boring, middle-aged teacher’s voice fade in to the background, falling in to his well-practiced habit of *not listening*.

“Bev,” He whispered, leaning forward. Beverly didn’t turn around, but leant her head back and positioned her ear closer to Richie’s mouth so she could hear better “you didn’t introduce me to your friend.”

“Ben.” She said, turning around and gesturing to the boy beside her. He waved sweetly and smiled.

“You’re Eddie’s friend, right?” Richie asked, convinced that he’d seen Ben sitting with Eddie in the cafeteria before.

“If you’d like to have a conversation,” The teacher piped up, gesturing towards the group. The kids sitting in front of them turned around and shot gleeful visual daggers at them, clearly excited to watch their classmates get in trouble “save it for lunch.”

“Sorry, sir.” Ben apologized, blushing hard from embarrassment.

“Well aren’t you a good boy?” Richie teased, practically cooing.

“Mr. Tozier.” The teacher warned, his voice hard. Richie looked up and sighed.

“Yessir.” He saluted for good measure, which caused Stanley to roll

his eyes and Beverly to giggle. Their teacher, in response, simply turned around and continued teaching as if nothing had happened. Beverly absently kicked behind herself and managed to snag Richie's left shin with a lazy blow. He felt a gentle pain sear through the bone there.

"Ow." Richie hissed, rubbing at his leg. *Was everyone going to abuse him in this class?*

"Leave my boy Ben alone." Beverly shot back jokingly, giving Ben a sweet smile. Richie grinned hard when he noticed the way he licked his lips and nervously looked away, already red cheeks turning a darker shade. *Boy, oh boy, was Ben in love.*

Richie made sure to knock the table throughout maths because Stanley got in to a *funk* whenever his books tilted and weren't perfectly straight. He was kicked under the table continuously throughout class and Stanley threatened to kill him on more than one occasion, but it was a fun way to pass the time.

The one class where Beverly and Richie were separated was History. It was, without a doubt, the *worst* class he had, both because he didn't have his favorite redhead to joke with, and (admittedly, mostly) because he was *forced to take it*. Richie couldn't help but think that while he was learning about some dead dude, he could've been reciting Hamlet on a stage if Mr. Vice just let him take drama (lack of interest his ass, what bullshit).

Things were made more bearable, however, when he noticed Ben sitting at a group table, the seat next to him completely free.

"Forced to take the subject too, Benny Boy?" Richie asked, sitting next to him as he spoke.

“No, I elected this as my first preference,” Richie wrinkled his nose in disgust “what? Not a fan?”

“I don’t need to learn about *dead people*.” Richie retorted.

“Actually,” Someone piped up from across the table. Richie turned to see a well-built kid sitting across from them. He smiled calmly “history is *very* important. It allows for us to analyse how the past affects society today.”

“And learn from previous mistakes.” Ben piped up.

“God, don’t tell me I’ve chosen to sit next to a pair of *history nerds*.” Richie groaned playfully. Ben blushed while the kid across from them grinned and laughed.

“Fraid so,” He leant forward to offer his hand. Richie took it. As they shook hands, he noticed how firm, confident and comforting his grip was “Mike.” He introduced himself.

“Richie,” He grinned “But you can just call me hot stuff.”

“How about *‘unintelligent kid who is a loser for thinking history is boring’*?” Richie snorted a laugh.

“That works, actually.”

“Has a nice ring to it.” Ben playfully added. Richie grinned back at the shy kid, excited to see him opening up to their friendship.

History turned out to be pretty alright, after all. Whenever Richie missed something, Ben would write down the answer and Mike would go on a passionate rant about the subject matter, which provided the much needed details he needed to add to his papers for higher grades (not that Richie cared about getting A’s, but Mike and Ben had made a point of helping him reach the top of the class with them). They were, in their own words, more than happy to help. As much as Richie paid the pair out for it, he loved listening to the lilt in their voices whenever they discussed historical politics or events. There was something about people being passionate about

something, people discussing the things they loved, which lit a fire on his insides.

Richie had never been a fit kind of kid; he didn't sign up for basketball or run across football fields playing hearty games of chase. At the age of 13, he had been the kind of kid who preferred the company of a good comic book and a handful of close friends, exercise completely unnecessary. So, of course, P.E quickly became a subject where he would walk laps instead of run and treat the class as free time, cracking jokes every ten seconds. Mr. Davis, a chunky, 50-something year old man with a half-genuine smile, was quick to hate him, the words '*at least try, Richie*' becoming a mantra he'd repeat daily.

He had noticed Bill took the class, and sometimes they'd joke around in the breaks, but he was more often than not running heartily and taking the class seriously. Stanley was more likely to walk with Richie between lazy jogs, but he would often run off with Bill as soon as he ran an extra lap around and passed them. Ben was too nice to cut Richie off whenever he *did* talk to him, but he liked to run alongside Bill down the tracks and would take any break in conversations to excuse himself. Beverly was the most likely to talk to Richie and walk alongside him, but she spent half the time watching (or talking to) Ben with a fond smile.

Richie spent most of his time considering the enticing concept of asking to go to the bathroom during lessons and just sitting in his dorm until the bell went. Skipping was a tantalizing threat to his education.

If you were to ask Richie what his relationship was Beverly after his

first week at McMannon, he would probably joke that they were dating. He would have an entirely different conversation in his mind, though, and he'd spend a considerable amount of time questioning whether they were close acquaintances, friends, or *good* friends.

It was, in the end, an invitation on the Friday of that week that sealed the deal. Sneaking in to someone's dorm (and being invited to do so) was always something, regardless of the boarding school, that *friends* did. Thusly, Beverly's invitation to hang out in her room (a *girl's* dorm room, which boys were definitely *not* allowed to visit) pretty much stamped the idea of their friendship in to his mind firmly. Richie, of course, said yes and spent the entirety of the day brimming with a frantic energy, his excitement evident.

All in all, the sleepover was a success. Beverly gave the boys entry by using her keycard to unlock the girl's dorms. She had invited a small party of people, somewhere just under ten. There was Ben and Bill (who Richie was kind of thankful to see, since he quickly got the impression that everyone else was rather *boring*), her roommate (a pixie-haired girl with a quiet but giggly demeanor), some broad shouldered jock guy in his P.E class and an array of other girls who he felt the need to group together, since their only personality trait seemed to be their undying friendship (blergh, how fucking cheezy).

Richie fell against Beverly's bed, cooing when she sat next to him and dropped a bottle of *something alcoholic* against his stomach. He made quick work of sitting up and uncapping it, hardly bothered to read the label and figure out what was inside.

"Beverly Marsh, you are a woman after my heart." He cooed, taking a quick swig. The liquid burned on its way down and wrapped against his heart warmly. Richie passed the bottle down to Ben, who immediately ditched it along to Bill without a moment's hesitation.

"Is this allowed, Bev?" He asked, watching as Bill took a lazy sip and passed the bottle along. Beverly grinned, jumping around to hug Ben's shoulders. He immediately stiffened, blushing a bright red colour.

"Don't worry, Ben. I have a dealer."

“Ooo~ A bad girl, I like it.” Richie joked in a sing-song voice. Beverly snorted and rolled her eyes, settling next to Ben on the floor and wedging her way between him and Bill.

“Gonna rag on me, new kid?” Beverly enquired in a playful tone, pointedly shooting Richie a look that was curiously flirty. Something about Beverly, that daring glint in her eyes and constant sense of *knowing* her worth, thrilled Richie. It’s not that he was particularly attracted to her, although even he could admit that making out with Beverly certainly wouldn’t be an *unpleasant* experience, but rather he was enthralled by that overlying sense of daring. Everything about her, from the way she walked right down to the tone of her voice, made you question your worth. She was a walking, talking personification of ‘*what you gonna do?*’

“Wouldn’t dream of it, fire-crotch.” Richie smiled, leaning back on his hands. From beside him, Ben gasped gently- sweet, innocent Ben.

“Nice one.” Beverly acknowledged, making a grabby gesture towards the alcohol being passed around for another swig.

The evening that followed was mostly average, nothing too wild beside the obvious consumption of contraband. Someone pulled out a small, portable DVD player, with a screen you had to squint at to actually see. It very clearly was against school rules to own, but Richie was well-aware that the rules didn’t really matter if you knew how to bounce around being caught.

While the group of generic, cheerleader archetype girls watched the movie playing intently, Ben, Bill and Beverly continued to chat idly. Richie was able to understand the dynamic almost immediately: Bill was often quiet, but when he spoke everyone *listened*. Ben would comment mostly sweet, Disney prince-esque things and blush whenever Beverly so much as glanced at him. Beverly would jump actively from person to person and everyone would stop and pay attention, because her presence seemingly demanded as much. Richie, ever the jester, squeezed perfectly in the middle of this dynamic- frustrating everyone with his innuendos yet earning smiles that indicated a private appreciation for the humor his lightness

added. He didn't want to call them anything more than friends (heaven forbid he used the word 'family'), but he certainly saw the group as good for company. Of course, he wouldn't dare get too attached: kids like Richie could don't form *proper* bonds, and things had always been good that way; he was all too aware that eventually, he'd be kicked from the school, and that would be that.

"Hey, Big Bill," Richie lay on his back and turned to his side to face his friend "pass me ya poison." He finished in an accent which was so garbled and incomprehensible that even he could admit that it was awful. To emphasise his point, he stretched his hand out and made a grabby motion, flexing and relaxing his fingers in a repeated gesture.

"Big Bill?" Bill asked, amused, as he leant over to pass the alcohol. Richie grabbed the bottle lazily, close to tipsy after an evening of drinking.

"Yep," He started, popping the *p* before tipping his head back and letting the alcohol coat his throat. With a gasp, wiping his arm lazily over his lips to get rid of the liquid sitting there, Richie set the bottle down "you already have big dick energy. It's a fitting name." He pointed out, smiling at Bill's flat expression.

"Wh-whatever you suh-say, Trashmouth." He retorted, grinning at the way Beverly snorted from beside him.

"Wow, Billiam. Please, do explain to me where that one comes from."

"F-for one, you sm- smuh- smell like shit," Richie noted the amused smile Ben tried to hide- far too nice to actively make fun of someone "and ha-half the s-stuff you say has proven to be a-ab-abs- *fuck!* Completely useless- Like litter."

"Touché." Richie drawled, smiling in a satisfied manner. Anyone who could give a good nickname was worthy of respect, in his opinion.

"Hey, Richie," Beverly began, head popping up from beside Bill as she sat up "who's your roommate?"

"Why, wanna know who to apologize when you're caught half-naked

in my room?" Richie winked as Beverly rolled her eyes.

"Sorry, I didn't know we were talking about your fantasies that have absolutely zero chance of being fulfilled. But please, do go on."

"You're so mean to me, Miss Marsh."

"Only because you're such a jackass." Beverly pointed out, smiling affectionately and leaning across Bill to smack his thigh in a goofy manner.

"I think Eddie is Richie's roommate, right?" Ben asked, smiling gently at Richie.

"The one and only," Richie sing-songed a bit too genuinely. With a gulp, he composed himself, shoving down any obvious hints towards finding his roommate mouth-wateringly irresistible "Bit hard to breathe around the kid though, he's so anal about everything." Richie took a deep breath and tried his best at a hypochondriac, nasally voice "*'fold your clothes, Richie' 'Wipe your shoes before you step inside!'*" I worry he's gonna have a heart attack with all that worrying." He concluded, perhaps a bit too genuinely. Really though, sometimes Richie would do something as simple as leave a pair of underwear on the floor and Eddie would be wheezing and going off on a lengthy tangent, head damn near popping off.

"What a spazz," One of the girl piped up, turning from the tiny DVD player to talk to the group "he can't even breathe properly." With a snarky kind of laugh, she clutched at her chest painfully, wheezing desperately as her eyes bugged out. Watching her giggle and make fun of Eddie, Richie became very aware that he wouldn't mind punching her.

"He's got asthma." Richie explained. The girl- Sadie, or Jessica or whatever, only laughed harder.

"*Looks like* an asthmatic, too."

"Shut the fuh-fuck up, Sarah." Bill snapped from beside Richie, sitting up straight and shooting her hard daggers. His voice boomed,

distinctly authoritative, and she immediately hunched down. If he could growl, Richie was pretty sure he would.

“Sorry, Bill.” Sarah muttered, suddenly looking rather small. Bill rose his brow for good measure, watching as she turned back to the movie playing. Richie looked at Bill, close to pulling him in for an apologetic hug. He didn’t mean to start something so mean.

“I shared with him for a while,” Ben quietly added, tone defensive “He’s a good roommate, you just have to respect his rules.” Richie opened his mouth, close to adding something along the lines of ‘*mi casa, su casa*’ but decided against it, feeling shameful.

“I’m sure he’s not as bad as half the snobs at this school.” Beverly piped up. Giving her a thankful look, Richie smiled when she winked at him, very clearly understanding his playful teasing.

“He can be harsh,” Ben continued, looking over to the girls but training his attention on Richie when he realized they weren’t paying him any mind “but he’s had a hard year. Give him time, he’ll warm up to you.”

“Shit, yeah,” Bill piped up, brows furrowed together “St-Stanley told me Buh- Bowers gave him sh-shit.”

“Holy fuck, they were roommates?” Beverly asked, seemingly shocked “Poor kid.”

“It isn’t my place to say, but he had a really hard time,” turning to Richie, Ben spoke sincerely “just be patient with Eddie, he’s a great friend but it’s hard for him to trust a roommate right now.” Richie nodded, swallowing thickly. He felt a heaviness press down on his chest, some kind of fierce protectiveness.

It seemed ridiculous to him, the thought of that mullet-wearing, greasy asshole even *looking* at someone as harmless as Eddie and deeming him a target. Kids like him, doe-eyed and pretty, should never be targets. It was always Richie, loud-mouthed, asking for it and a little bit too smart for his own good, that got kicked around. But, by God, did the thought of tiny, feisty, little Eddie- a kid he’d

only known for a week but had grown to adore in a crushy, pining manner- being hurt make his inner being burn with a silent kind of rage. Sarah wheezing, poking fun at him, had been enough to make Richie irritated, but Henry Bowers did something much more to him. Anyone like him, a bully, made him so incredibly pissed off that it was a wonder he hadn't gotten in to any serious punch-ups yet.

"I wasn't trying to-"Richie began.

"I know," Ben reassured, smiling gently "You're just teasing." Thankfully, Richie smiled. God, he'd hate himself forever if anyone thought for so much as a second that he would genuinely bully the kid.

Richie bit his lip hard, quietly tiptoeing through the dorm hallway to get to his room. The whole escapade was, needless to say, a difficult operation. Rushing past staff members, sneaking behind them while their backs were turned, was anything short of easy, especially since Richie was *quite* tipsy and there was a whole group of boys with him the whole time. Parting ways from Ben and Bill, who both had dorm rooms further up the building, Richie quietly waited for the hall monitor to turn a corner before hurriedly rushing past, zooming to his dorm room in fear of being caught.

Clutching at the door handle, Richie silently thanked the Gods for letting him get away scot-free, quietly wrenching his door open, aware of his fear of awakening the beast that is Eddie Kaspbrak. Carefully, he shut the door closed behind himself with a click, stumbling in the dark and towards his bed, hands outstretched in front of himself like a zombie. At one point, he knocked his foot on a shoe and silently cursed with a hiss, continuing the trek to his bed quietly.

His knees knocked against the edge, which prompted Richie to kick off his shoes and shimmy out of his school pants quickly, opting to

sleep in a pair of boxers rather than spend more time wondering around in the dark. The moment his head hit his pillow, however, Richie learnt that he needn't worry about waking up his roommate.

"It's past curfew, dickwad." Eddie murmured, voice adorably thick with asleep.

"Sorry, *mom*." Richie teased, grinning in the dark. He listened carefully as Eddie scoffed and the sound of sheets moving reached his ears as he, presumably, twisted to his side.

"Could see the light when you opened the door, hurt my eyes." Eddie grumbled. Richie bit his lip hard to keep from cooing. *Could you blame the guy, complaining about sore eyes was the single-cutest thing he could've said.* "M a light sleeper, gonna kill you if 'm tired in the morning." His voice slowly quieted as sleepiness overtook him.

"It isn't *that* late." Richie reasoned. In response, Eddie made a low, grumbly kind of noise, one which subconsciously went straight to Richie's dick.

"Don't do it again."

"Alrighty, Eds."

"Isn't my name." Eddie yawned sweetly, cutely, and Richie felt his lips tug up in a tender smile.

"Goodnight." He tried fondly.

"Shu' up." Eddie muttered. Slowly, Richie closed his eyes, close to humming contently.

Lying in bed, listening to the way Eddie's breathing evened out as he fell asleep, Richie thought about Henry Bowers. There was a good chance that if he had bullied Georgie, Bill's brother, in to giving up his allowance money, he wasn't above pushing Eddie around either. The picture of that, his tiny roommate being knocked around, burned in Richie's mind and filled him with an innate rage.

Could Richie really blame him for being antagonistic if his previous roommate has been, in Beverly's words only a few days ago, such a 'prick'?

Notes for the Chapter:

Not exactly happy with this chapter, but I hope it's okay :)

Check out my tumblr, if you're interested:
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